SHORT LOAN

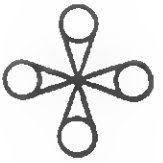
MIRCEA ELIADE

# THE MYTH OF THE ETERNAL RETURN

## or, Cosmos and History

*Translated from the French by*

WILLARD R. TRASK



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TO

Tantzi AND Brutus Coste

*in Memory of our Evenings*

*at the Chalet Chaimite*

*

to his thirst for the real and his terror of "losing" himself by letting himself be overwhelmed by the meaninglessness of profane existence.

It matters little if the formulas and images through which the primitive expresses "reality" seem childish and even absurd to us. It is the profound meaning of primitive behavior that is revelatory; this behavior is governed by belief in an absolute reality opposed to the profane world of "unrealities"; in the last analysis, the latter does not constitute a "world," properly speaking; it is the "unreal" *par excellence*, the uncreated, the nonexistent: the void.

Hence we are justified in speaking of an archaic ontology, and it is only by taking this ontology into consideration that we can succeed in understanding—and hence in not scornfully dismissing—even the most extravagant behavior on the part of the primitive world; in fact, this behavior corresponds to a desperate effort not to lose contact with *being*.

CHAPTER THREE

# MISFORTUNE AND HISTORY

*Normality of Suffering · History Regarded as Theophany · Cosmic Cycles and History*
*Destiny and History*

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# Normality of Suffering

WITH this chapter, we hope to approach human life and historical existence from a new point of view. Archaic man, as has been shown, tends to set himself in opposition, by every means in his power, to history, regarded as a succession of events that are irreversible, unforeseeable, possessed of autonomous value. He refuses to accept it and to grant it value as such, as *history* —without, however, always being able to exorcise it; for example, he is powerless against cosmic catastrophes, military disasters, social injustices bound up with the very structure of society, personal misfortunes, and so forth. Thus it would be interesting to learn how this "history" was tolerated by archaic man; that is, how he endured the calamities, the mishaps, and the "sufferings" that entered into the lot of each individual and each collectivity.

What does living mean for a man who belongs to a traditional culture? Above all, it means living in accordance with extrahuman models, in conformity with archetypes. Hence it means living at the heart of the *real* since —as Chapter I sufficiently emphasized—there is nothing truly real except the archetypes. Living in conformity with the archetypes amounted to respecting the "law," since the law was only a primordial hierophany, the revelation *in illo tempore* of the norms of existence, a disclosure by a divinity or a mystical being. And if, through the repetition of paradigmatic gestures and by means of periodic ceremonies, archaic man succeeded, as we have seen, in annuling time, he none the less lived in harmony with the cosmic rhythms; we could even say that he entered into these rhythms (we need only remember how "real" night and day are to him, and the seasons, the cycles of the moon, the solstices).

vinced that it is a religious fault) or from his neighbor's malevolence (in cases where the sorcerer discovers that magical action is involved); but there is always a fault at the bottom of it, or at the very least a cause, recognized in the will of the forgotten Supreme God, to whom man is finally forced to address himself. In each case, the suffering becomes intelligible and hence tolerable. Against this suffering, the primitive struggles with all the magico-religious means available to him—but he tolerates it morally because *it is not absurd*. The critical moment of the suffering lies in its appearance; suffering is perturbing only insofar as its cause remains undiscovered. As soon as the sorcerer or the priest discovers what is causing children or animals to die, drought to continue, rain to increase, game to disappear, the suffering begins to become tolerable; it has a meaning and a cause, hence it can be fitted into a system and explained.

What we have just said of the primitive applies in large measure to the man of the archaic cultures. Naturally, the motifs that yield a justification for suffering and pain vary from people to people, but the justification is found everywhere. In general, it may be said that suffering is regarded as the consequence of a deviation in respect to the "norm." That this norm differs from people to people, and from civilization to civilization, goes without saying. But the important point for us is that nowhere—within the frame of the archaic civilizations—are suffering and pain regarded as "blind" and without meaning.

Thus the Indians quite early elaborated a conception of universal causality, the karma concept, which accounts for the actual events and sufferings of the individual's life and at the same time explains the necessity for transmigrations. In the light of the law of karma, sufferings not only find a meaning but also acquire a positive value. The suf-





ferings of one's present life are not only deserved—since they are in fact the fatal effect of crimes and faults committed in previous lives—they are also welcome, for it is only in this way that it is possible to absorb and liquidate part of the karmic debt that burdens the individual and determines the cycle of his future existences. According to the Indian conception, every man is born with a debt, but with freedom to contract new debts. His existence forms a long series of payments and borrowings, the account of which is not always obvious. A man not totally devoid of intelligence can serenely tolerate the sufferings, griefs, and blows that come to him, the injustices of which he is the object, because each of them solves a karmic equation that had remained unsolved in some previous existence. Naturally, Indian speculation very early sought and discovered means through which man can free himself from this endless chain of cause-effect-cause, and so on, determined by the law of karma. But such solutions do nothing to invalidate the meaning of suffering; on the contrary, they strengthen it. Like Yoga, Buddhism sets out from the principle that all existence is pain, and it offers the possibility of a concrete and final way of escape from this unbroken succession of sufferings to which, in the last analysis, every human life can be reduced. But Buddhism, like Yoga, and indeed like every other Indian method of winning liberation, never for a moment casts any doubt upon the "normality" of pain. As to Vedānta, for it suffering is "illusory" only insofar as the whole universe is illusory; neither the human experience of suffering nor the universe is a reality in the ontological sense of the word. With the exception constituted by the materialistic Lokāyata and Chārvāka schools—for which neither the "soul" nor "God" exists and which consider avoiding pain and seeking pleasure the only rational end that man

can set himself—all India has accorded to sufferings, whatever their nature (cosmic, psychological, or historical), a clearly defined meaning and function. Karma ensures that everything happening in the world takes place in conformity with the immutable law of cause and effect.

If the archaic world nowhere presents us with a formula as explicit as that of karma to explain the normality of suffering, we do everywhere find in it an equal tendency to grant suffering and historical events a "normal meaning." To treat all the expressions of this tendency here is out of the question. Almost everywhere we come upon the archaic concept (predominant among primitives) according to which suffering is to be imputed to the divine will, whether as directly intervening to produce it or as permitting other forces, demonic or divine, to provoke it. The destruction of a harvest, drought, the sack of a city by an enemy, loss of freedom or life, any calamity (epidemic, earthquake, and so on)—there is nothing that does not, in one way or another, find its explanation and justification in the transcendent, in the divine economy. Whether the god of the conquered city was less powerful than the god of the victorious army; whether a ritual fault, on the part of the entire community or merely on that of a single family, was committed in respect to one divinity or another; whether spells, demons, negligences, curses are involved—an individual or a collective suffering always has its explanation. And, consequently, it is, it *can be*, tolerable.

Nor is this all. In the Mediterranean-Mesopotamian area, man's sufferings were early connected with those of a god. To do so was to endow them with an archetype that gave them both reality and normality. The very ancient myth of the suffering, death, and resurrection of Tammuz has replicas and imitations almost throughout the Paleo-Oriental world, and traces of its scenario were pre-





served even down to post-Christian gnosticism. This is not the place to enter into the cosmologico-agricultural origins and the eschatological structure of Tammuz. We shall confine ourselves to a reminder that the sufferings and resurrection of Tammuz also provided a model for the sufferings of other divinities (Marduk, for example) and doubtless were mimed (hence repeated) each year by the king. The popular lamentations and rejoicings that commemorated the sufferings, death, and resurrection of Tammuz, or of any other cosmico-agrarian divinity, produced, in the consciousness of the East, a repercussion whose extent has been badly underestimated. For it was not a question merely of a presentiment of the resurrection that will follow death, but also, and no less, of the consoling power of Tammuz' sufferings for each individual. Any suffering could be tolerated if the drama of Tammuz was remembered.

For this mythical drama reminded men that suffering is never final; that death is always followed by resurrection; that every defeat is annulled and transcended by the final victory. The analogy between these myths and the lunar drama outlined in the preceding chapter is obvious. What we wish to emphasize at this point is that Tammuz, or any other variant of the same archetype, justifies—in other words, renders tolerable—the sufferings of the "just." The god—as so often the "just," the "innocent"—suffered without being guilty. He was humiliated, flogged till the lash drew blood, imprisoned in a "pit," that is, in hell. Here it was that the Great Goddess (or, in the later, gnostic versions, a "messenger") visited him, encouraged him, and revived him. This consoling myth of the god's sufferings was long in fading from the consciousness of the peoples of the East. Professor Widengren, for instance, believes that it is among the Manichaean and Mandaean

prototypes,[3] though of course with the inevitable changes and new valences that it acquired during the period of Greco-Oriental syncretism. In any case, one fact forces itself upon our attention: such mythological scenarios present an extremely archaic structure, which derives—if not "historically," at least morphologically—from lunar myths whose antiquity we have no reason to question. We have observed that lunar myths afforded an optimistic view of life in general; everything takes place cyclically, death is inevitably followed by resurrection, cataclysm by a new Creation. The paradigmatic myth of Tammuz (also extended to other Mesopotamian divinities) offers us a new ratification of this same optimism: it is not only the individual's death that is "saved"; the same is true of his sufferings. At least the gnostic, Mandaean, and Manichaean echoes of the Tammuz myth suggest this. For these sects, man as such must bear the lot that once fell to Tammuz; fallen into the pit, slave to the Prince of Darkness, man is awakened by a messenger who brings him the good tidings of his imminent salvation, of his "liberation." Lacking though we are in documents that would allow us to extend the same conclusions to Tammuz, we are nevertheless inclined to believe that his drama was not looked upon as foreign to the human drama. Hence the great popular success of rites connected with the so-called vegetation divinities.

## History Regarded as Theophany

AMONG the Hebrews, every new historical calamity was regarded as a punishment inflicted by Yahweh, angered by the orgy of sin to which the chosen people had aban-

[3] Geo Widengren, *King and Saviour*, II (Uppsala, 1947).





doned themselves. No military disaster seemed absurd, no suffering was vain, for, beyond the "event," it was always possible to perceive the will of Yahweh. Even more: these catastrophes were, we may say, necessary, they were foreseen by God so that the Jewish people should not contravene its true destiny by alienating the religious heritage left by Moses. Indeed, each time that history gave them the opportunity, each time that they enjoyed a period of comparative peace and economic prosperity, the Hebrews turned from Yahweh and to the Baals and Astartes of their neighbors. Only historical catastrophes brought them back to the right road by forcing them to look toward the true God. Then "they cried unto the Lord, and said, We have sinned, because we have forsaken the Lord, and have served Baalim and Ashtaroth: but now deliver us out of the hand of our enemies, and we will serve thee" (I Samuel 12 : 10). This return to the true God in the hour of disaster reminds us of the desperate gesture of the primitive, who, to rediscover the existence of the Supreme Being, requires the extreme of peril and the failure of all addresses to other divine forms (gods, ancestors, demons). Yet the Hebrews, from the moment the great military Assyro-Babylonian empires appeared on their historical horizon, lived constantly under the threat proclaimed by Yahweh: "But if ye will not obey the voice of the Lord, but rebel against the commandment of the Lord, then shall the hand of the Lord be against you, as it was against your fathers" (I Samuel 12 : 15).

Through their terrifying visions, the prophets but confirmed and amplified Yahweh's ineluctable chastisement upon His people who had not kept the faith. And it is only insofar as such prophecies were ratified by catastrophes (as, indeed, was the case from Elijah to Jeremiah) that historical events acquired religious significance; i.e., that

they clearly appeared as punishments inflicted by the Lord in return for the impiousness of Israel. Because of the prophets, who interpreted contemporary events in the light of a strict faith, these events were transformed into "negative theophanies," into Yahweh's "wrath." Thus they not only acquired a meaning (because, as we have seen, for the entire Oriental world, every historical event had its own signification) but they also revealed their hidden coherence by proving to be the concrete expression of the same single divine will. Thus, for the first time, the prophets placed a value on history, succeeded in transcending the traditional vision of the cycle (the conception that ensures all things will be repeated forever), and discovered a one-way time. This discovery was not to be immediately and fully accepted by the consciousness of the entire Jewish people, and the ancient conceptions were still long to survive.

But, for the first time, we find affirmed, and increasingly accepted, the idea that historical events have a value in themselves, insofar as they are determined by the will of God. This God of the Jewish people is no longer an Oriental divinity, creator of archetypal gestures, but a personality who ceaselessly intervenes in history, who reveals his will through events (invasions, sieges, battles, and so on). Historical facts thus become "situations" of man in respect to God, and as such they acquire a religious value that nothing had previously been able to confer on them. It may, then, be said with truth that the Hebrews were the first to discover the meaning of history as the epiphany of God, and this conception, as we should expect, was taken up and amplified by Christianity.

We may even ask ourselves if monotheism, based upon the direct and personal revelation of the divinity, does not necessarily entail the "salvation" of time, its value within the frame of history. Doubtless the idea of revelation is





found, in more or less perspicuous form, in all religions, we could even say in all cultures. In fact (the reader may refer to Chapter 1), the archetypal gestures—finally reproduced in endless succession by man—were at the same time hierophanies or theophanies. The first dance, the first duel, the first fishing expedition, like the first marriage ceremony or the first ritual, became examples for humanity because they revealed a mode of existence of the divinity, of the primordial man, of the civilizing Hero. But these revelations occurred in *mythical* time, at the extratemporal instant of the beginning; thus, as we saw in Chapter 1, everything in a certain sense coincided with the beginning of the world, with the cosmogony. Everything had taken place and had been revealed at that moment, *in illo tempore:* the creation of the world, and that of man, and man's establishment in the situation provided for him in the cosmos, down to the least details of that situation (physiology, sociology, culture, and so on).

The situation is altogether different in the case of the monotheistic revelation. This takes place in time, in historical duration: Moses receives the Law at a certain place and at a certain date. Of course, here too archetypes are involved, in the sense that these events, raised to the rank of examples, will be repeated; but they will not be repeated until the times are accomplished, that is, in a new *illud tempus*. For example, as Isaiah (11 : 15–16) prophesies, the miraculous passages of the Red Sea and the Jordan will be repeated "in the day." Nevertheless, the moment of the revelation made to Moses by God remains a limited moment, definitely situated in time. And, since it also represents a theophany, it thus acquires a new dimension: it becomes precious inasmuch as it is no longer reversible, as it is historical event.

Yet Messianism hardly succeeds in accomplishing the

eschatological valorization of time: the future will regenerate time; that is, will restore its original purity and integrity. Thus, *in illo tempore* is situated not only at the beginning of time but also at its end.[4] In these spacious Messianic visions it is also easy to discern the very old scenario of annual regeneration of the cosmos by repetition of the Creation and by the drama of the suffering king. The Messiah—on a higher plane, of course—assumes the eschatological role of the king as god, or as representing the divinity on earth, whose chief mission was the periodical regeneration of all nature. His sufferings recalled those of the king, but, as in the ancient scenarios, the victory was always finally the king's. The only difference is that this victory over the forces of darkness and chaos no longer occurs regularly every year but is projected into a future and Messianic *illud tempus*.

Under the "pressure of history" and supported by the prophetic and Messianic experience, a new interpretation of historical events dawns among the children of Israel. Without finally renouncing the traditional concept of archetypes and repetitions, Israel attempts to "save" historical events by regarding them as active presences of Yahweh. Whereas, for example, among the Mesopotamian peoples individual or collective sufferings were tolerated insofar as they were caused by the conflict between divine and demonic forces, that is, formed a part of the cosmic drama (the Creation being, from time immemorial and *ad infinitum*, preceded by chaos and tending to be reabsorbed in it; a new birth implying, from time immemorial and *ad infinitum*, sufferings and passions, etc.), in the Israel of the Messianic prophets, historical events could be tolerated because, on the one hand, they were willed

[4] Cf. G. van der Leeuw, "Primordial Time and Final Time," in *Man and Time* (New York and London, 1957), pp. 324–50.





by Yahweh, and, on the other hand, because they were necessary to the final salvation of the chosen people. Rehandling the old scenarios (type: Tammuz) of the "passion" of a god, Messianism gives them a new value, especially by abolishing their possibility of repetition *ad infinitum*. When the Messiah comes, the world will be saved once and for all and history will cease to exist. In this sense we are justified in speaking not only of an eschatological granting of value to the future, to "that day," but also of the "salvation" of historical becoming. History no longer appears as a cycle that repeats itself *ad infinitum*, as the primitive peoples represented it (creation, exhaustion, destruction, annual re-creation of the cosmos), and as it was formulated—as we shall see immediately—in theories of Babylonian origin (creation, destruction, creation extending over considerable periods of time: millennia, Great Years, aeons). Directly ordered by the will of Yahweh, history appears as a series of theophanies, negative or positive, each of which has its intrinsic value. Certainly, all military defeats can be referred back to an archetype: Yahweh's wrath. But each of these defeats, though basically a repetition of the same archetype, nevertheless acquires a coefficient of irreversibility: Yahweh's personal intervention. The fall of Samaria, for example, though assimilable to that of Jerusalem, yet differs from it in the fact that it was provoked by a new gesture on the part of Yahweh, by a new intervention of the Lord in history.

But it must not be forgotten that these Messianic conceptions are the exclusive creation of a religious elite. For many centuries, this elite undertook the religious education of the people of Israel, without always being successful in eradicating the traditional Paleo-Oriental granting of value to life and history. The Hebrews' periodic returns

to the Baals and Astartes are also largely to be explained by their refusal to allow a value to history, that is, to regard it as a theophany. For the popular strata, and especially for the agrarian communities, the old religious concept (that of the Baals and Astartes) was preferable; it kept them closer to "life" and helped them to tolerate history if not to ignore it. The Messianic prophets' steadfast will to look history in the face and to accept it as a terrifying dialogue with Yahweh, their will to make military defeats bear moral and religious fruit and to tolerate them because they were regarded as *necessary* to Yahweh's reconciliation with the people of Israel and its final salvation—their will, again, to regard any and every moment as a decisive moment and hence to give it worth religiously —demanded too great a religious tension, and the majority of the Israelites refused to submit to it,[5] just as the majority of Christians, and especially the popular elements, refuse to live the genuine life of Christianity. It was more consoling, and easier, in misfortunes and times of trial, to go on accusing an "accident" (e.g., a spell) or a "negligence" (e.g., a ritual fault) that could easily be made good by a sacrifice (even though it were the sacrifice of infants to Moloch).

In this respect, the classic example of Abraham's sacrifice admirably illustrates the difference between the traditional conception of the repetition of an archetypal gesture

[5] Without religious elites, and more especially without the prophets, Judaism would not have become anything very different from the religion of the Jewish colony in Elephantine, which preserved the popular Palestinian religious viewpoint down to the fifth century B.C.; cf. Albert Vincent, *La Religion des Judéo-Araméens d'Éléphantine* (Paris, 1937). History had allowed these Hebrews of the Diaspora to retain, side by side with Yahweh (Jaho), other divinities (Bethel, Harambethel, Ashumbethel), and even the goddess Anath, in a convenient syncretism. This is one more confirmation of the importance of history in the development of Judaic religious experience and its maintenance under high tensions. For, as we must not forget, the institutions of prophecy and Messianism were above all validated by the pressure of contemporary history.





and the new dimension, *faith*, acquired through religious experience.[6] Morphologically considered, Abraham's sacrifice is nothing but the sacrifice of the first born, a frequent practice in this Paleo-Oriental world in which the Hebrews evolved down to the period of the prophets. The first child was often regarded as the child of a god; indeed, throughout the archaic East, unmarried girls customarily spent a night in the temple and thus conceived by the god (by his representative, the priest, or by his envoy, the "stranger"). The sacrifice of this first child restored to the divinity what belonged to him. Thus the young blood increased the exhausted energy of the god (for the so-called fertility gods exhausted their own substance in the effort expended in maintaining the world and ensuring it abundance; hence they themselves needed to be periodically regenerated). And, in a certain sense, Isaac was a son of God, since he had been given to Abraham and Sarah when Sarah had long passed the age of fertility. But Isaac was given them through their faith; he was the son of the promise and of faith. His sacrifice by Abraham, although in form it resembles all the sacrifices of newborn infants in the Paleo-Semitic world, differs from them fundamentally in content. Whereas, for the entire Paleo-Semitic world, such a sacrifice, despite its religious function, was only a custom, a rite whose meaning was perfectly intelligible, in Abraham's case it is an act of faith. He does not understand why the sacrifice is demanded of him; nevertheless he performs it because it was the Lord who demanded it. By this act, which is apparently absurd, Abraham initiates a

[6] It may be of some service to point out that what is called "faith" in the Judaeo-Christian sense differs, regarded structurally, from other archaic religious experiences. The authenticity and religious validity of these latter must not be doubted, because they are based upon a universally verified dialectic of the sacred. But the experience of faith is due to a new theophany, a new revelation, which, for the respective elites, annuls the validity of other hierophanies. On this subject, see our *Patterns in Comparative Religion*, Ch. I.

new religious experience, faith. All others (the whole Oriental world) continue to move in an economy of the sacred that will be transcended by Abraham and his successors. To employ Kierkegaard's terminology, their sacrifices belonged to the "general"; that is, they were based upon archaic theophanies that were concerned only with the circulation of sacred energy in the cosmos (from the divinity to man and nature, then from man—through sacrifice—back to the divinity, and so on). These were acts whose justification lay in themselves; they entered into a logical and coherent system: what had belonged to God must be returned to him. For Abraham, Isaac was a *gift* from the Lord and not the product of a direct and material conception. Between God and Abraham yawned an abyss; there was a fundamental break in continuity. Abraham's religious act inaugurates a new religious dimension: God reveals himself as personal, as a "totally distinct" existence that ordains, bestows, demands, without any rational (i.e., general and foreseeable) justification, and for which all is possible. This new religious dimension renders "faith" possible in the Judaeo-Christian sense.

We have cited this example in order to illuminate the novelty of the Jewish religion in comparison with the traditional structures. Just as Abraham's experience can be regarded as a new religious position of man in the cosmos, so, through the prophetic office and Messianism, historical events reveal themselves, in the consciousness of the Israelitic elites, as a dimension they had not previously known: the historical event becomes a theophany, in which are revealed not only Yahweh's will but also the personal relations between him and his people. The same conception, enriched through the elaboration of Christology, will serve as the basis for the philosophy of history that Christianity, from St. Augustine on, will labor to con-





struct. But let us repeat: neither in Christianity nor in Judaism does the discovery of this new dimension in religious experience, faith, produce a basic modification of traditional conceptions. Faith is merely made possible for each individual Christian. The great majority of so-called Christian populations continue, down to our day, to preserve themselves from history by ignoring it and by tolerating it rather than by giving it the meaning of a negative or positive theophany.[7]

However, the acceptance and consecration of history by the Judaic elites does not mean that the traditional attitude, which we examined in the preceding chapter, is transcended. Messianic beliefs in a final regeneration of the world themselves also indicate an antihistoric attitude. Since he can no longer ignore or periodically abolish history, the Hebrew tolerates it in the hope that it will finally end, at some more or less distant future moment. The irreversibility of historical events and of time is compensated by the limitation of history to time. In the spiritual horizon of Messianism, resistance to history appears as still more determined than in the traditional horizon of archetypes and repetitions; if, here, history was refused, ignored, or abolished by the periodic repetition of the Creation and by the periodic regeneration of time, in the Messianic conception history must be tolerated because it has an eschatological function, but it can be tolerated only because it is known that, one day or another, it will cease. History is thus abolished, not through consciousness of living an eternal present (coincidence with the atemporal instant of the revelation of archetypes), nor by means of a periodically repeated ritual (for example, the rites for the beginning of the year)—it is abolished in the

[7] This does not imply that these populations (which are for the most part agrarian in structure) are nonreligious; it implies only the "traditional" (archetypal) "revalorization" that they have given to Christian experience.

future. Periodic regeneration of the Creation is replaced by a single regeneration that will take place in an *in illo tempore* to come. But the will to put a final and definitive end to history is itself still an antihistorical attitude, exactly as are the other traditional conceptions.

## Cosmic Cycles and History

THE MEANING acquired by history in the frame of the various archaic civilizations is nowhere more clearly revealed than in the theories of the great cosmic cycles, which we mentioned in passing in the preceding chapter. We must return to these theories, for it is here that two distinct orientations first define themselves: the one traditional, adumbrated (without ever having been clearly formulated) in all primitive cultures, that of cyclical time, periodically regenerating itself *ad infinitum;* the other modern, that of finite time, a fragment (though itself also cyclical) between two atemporal eternities.

Almost all these theories of the "Great Time" are found in conjunction with the myth of successive ages, the "age of gold" always occurring at the beginning of the cycle, close to the paradigmatic *illud tempus.* In the two doctrines—that of cyclical time, and that of limited cyclical time—this age of gold is recoverable; in other words, it is repeatable, an infinite number of times in the former doctrine, once only in the latter. We do not mention these facts for their intrinsic interest, great as it is, but to clarify the meaning of history from the point of view of either doctrine. We shall begin with the Indian tradition, for it is here that the myth of the eternal return has received its boldest formulation. Belief in the periodic destruction and creation of the universe is already found in the





*Atharva-Veda* (X, 8, 39–40). The preservation of similar ideas in the Germanic tradition (universal conflagration, Ragnarok, followed by a new creation) confirms the Indo-Aryan structure of the myth, which can therefore be considered one of the numerous variants of the archetype examined in the preceding chapter. (Possible Oriental influences upon Germanic mythology do not necessarily destroy the authenticity and autochthonous character of the Ragnarok myth. It would, besides, be difficult to explain why the Indo-Aryans did not also share, from the period of their common prehistory, the conception of time held by all primitives.)

Indian speculation, however, amplifies and orchestrates the rhythms that govern the periodicity of cosmic creations and destructions. The smallest unit of measure of the cycle is the yuga, the "age." A yuga is preceded and followed by a "dawn" and a "twilight" that connect the ages together. A complete cycle, or Mahāyuga, is composed of four ages of unequal duration, the longest appearing at the beginning of the cycle and the shortest at its end. Thus the first age, the Kṛta Yuga, lasts 4,000 years, plus 400 years of dawn and as many of twilight; then come the Tretā Yuga of 3,000 years, Dvāpara Yuga of 2,000 years, and Kali Yuga of 1,000 years (plus, of course, their corresponding dawns and twilights). Hence a Mahāyuga lasts 12,000 years (*Manu*, I, 69 ff.; *Mahābhārata*, III, 12,826). To the progressive decrease in duration of each new yuga, there corresponds, on the human plane, a decrease in the length of life, accompanied by a corruption in morals and a decline in intelligence. This continuous decadence upon all planes—biological, intellectual, ethical, social, and so on—assumes particular emphasis in the Purāṇic texts (cf., for example *Vayu Purāṇa*, I, 8; *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, VI, 3). Transition from one yuga to the next takes place, as we

have seen, during a twilight, which marks a decrescendo within the yuga itself, each yuga ending by a phase of darkness. As the end of the cycle, that is, the fourth and last yuga, is approached, the darkness deepens. The Kali Yuga, that in which we are today, is, moreover, considered to be the "age of darkness." The complete cycle is terminated by a "dissolution," a Pralaya, which is repeated more intensively (Mahāpralaya, the "great dissolution") at the end of the thousandth cycle.

H. Jacobi [8] rightly believes that, in the original doctrine, a yuga was equivalent to a complete cycle, comprising the birth, "wear," and destruction of the universe. Such a doctrine, moreover, was closer to the archetypal myth (lunar in structure), which we have studied in our *Traité d'histoire des religions*. Later speculation only amplified and reproduced *ad infinitum* the primordial rhythm, creation-destruction-creation, by projecting the unit of measure, the yuga, into more and more extensive cycles. The 12,000 years of a Mahāyuga were considered "divine years," each lasting 360 years, which gives a total of 4,320,000 years for a single cosmic cycle. A thousand such Mahāyuga constitute a Kalpa; fourteen Kalpa make a Manvantāra. A Kalpa is equivalent to a day in the life of Brahmā; another Kalpa to a night. A hundred "years" of Brahmā constitute his life. But even this duration of the life of Brahmā does not succeed in exhausting time, for the gods are not eternal and the cosmic creations and destructions succeed one another *ad infinitum*. (Other systems of calculation even increase the corresponding durations.)

What it is important to note in this avalanche of figures [9]

[8] In Hastings' *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, I, pp. 200 ff.

[9] Doubtless provoked by the astrological aspect of the yuga, in the establishment of which Babylonian astronomical influences are not excluded; cf. Alfred Jeremias, *Handbuch der altorientalischen Geisteskultur* (2nd edn., Berlin-Leipzig, 1929), p. 303. See also Emil Abegg, *Der Messiasglaube in Indien und Iran* (Berlin,





is the cyclical character of cosmic time. In fact, we are confronted with the infinite repetition of the same phenomenon (creation-destruction-new creation), adumbrated in each yuga (dawn and twilight) but completely realized by a Mahāyuga. The life of Brahmā thus comprises 2,560,000 of these Mahāyuga, each repeating the same phases (Kṛta, Tretā, Dvāpara, Kali) and ending with a Pralaya, a Ragnarok ("final" destruction, in the sense of a retrogression of all forms to an amorphous mass, occurring at the end of each Kalpa at the time of the Mahāpralaya). In addition to the metaphysical depreciation of history—which, in proportion to and by the mere fact of its duration, provokes an erosion of all forms by exhausting their ontologic substance—and in addition to the myth of the perfection of the beginnings, which we also find here once again, what deserves our attention in this orgy of figures is the eternal repetition of the fundamental rhythm of the cosmos: its periodic destruction and re-creation. From this cycle without beginning or end, man can wrest himself only by an act of spiritual freedom (for all Indian soteriological solutions can be reduced to preliminary liberation from the cosmic illusion and to spiritual freedom).

The two great heterodoxies, Buddhism and Jainism, accept the same pan-Indian doctrine of cyclical time, at least in its chief outlines, and compare it to a wheel with twelve spokes (this image is already employed in Vedic texts; cf. *Atharva-Veda*, X, 8, 4; *Ṛg-Veda*, I, 164, 115; etc.).

As its unit of measure for the cosmic cycles, Buddhism adopts the Kalpa (Pāli: *kappa*), divided into a variable num-

1928), pp. 8 ff.; Isidor Scheftelowitz, *Die Zeit als Schicksalsgottheit in der indischen und iranischen Religion* (Stuttgart, 1929); D. R. Mankad, "Manvantara-Caturyuga Method," *Annals of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute*, XXIII, Silver Jubilee Volume (Poona, 1942), pp. 271–90; and our "Time and Eternity in Indian Thought," in *Man and Time*, pp. 173–200, and in *Images and Symbols: Studies in Religious Symbolism* (English trans., London and New York, 1961), Ch. II.

ber of "incalculables" (*asaṃkhyeya*, Pāli: *asaṅkheyya*). Pāli sources generally speak of four *asaṅkheyya* and a hundred thousand *kappa* (cf., for example, *Jātaka*, I, 2); in Mahāyānic literature, the number of incalculables varies between 3, 7, and 33, and they are connected with the career of the Bodhisattva in the various cosmoses.[10] In the Buddhist tradition, the progressive decadence of man is marked by a continuous decrease in the length of human life. Thus, according to *Dīgha-nikāya*, II, 2–7, at the time of the first Buddha, Vipassi, who made his appearance 91 *kappa* ago, the length of a human life was 80,000 years; at that of the second Buddha, Sikhi (31 *kappa* ago), it was 70,000 years, and so on. The seventh Buddha, Gautama, appears when a human life is only 100 years, i.e., has been reduced to the utmost. (We shall encounter the same motif again in Iranian and Christian apocalypses.) Nevertheless, for Buddhism, as for all Indian speculation, time is limitless; and the Bodhisattva will become incarnate to announce the good tidings of salvation to all beings, *in aeternum*. The only possibility of escaping from time, of breaking the iron circle of existences, is to abolish the human condition and win Nirvana.[11] Besides, all these "incalculables" and all these numberless aeons also have a soteriological function; simply contemplating the panorama of them terrifies man and forces him to realize that

[10] Cf. Asaṅga, *Mahāyāna-saṃparigraha*, V, 6; Louis de La Vallée-Poussin, *Vijñaptimātratāsiddhi* (Paris, 1929), pp. 731–33, etc. On calculation of the *asaṅkheyya*, cf. La Vallée-Poussin's notes in *L'Abhidharmakośa* (Paris, 1923–1926), III, pp. 188–89; IV, p. 224; and the *Mahāprajñāpāramitāśastra* of Nāgārjuna, trans. from the Chinese version by Étienne Lamotte, *Le Traité de la Grande Vertu de Sagesse de Nāgārjuna*, Pt. 1 (Louvain, 1944), pp. 247 ff. On the philosophic conceptions of time, cf. La Vallée-Poussin, "Documents d'Abhidharma: la controverse du temps," *Mélanges chinois et bouddhiques*, V (Brussels, 1937), pp. 1–158; and Stanislaw Schayer, *Contributions to the Problem of Time in Indian Philosophy* (Cracow, 1938). Cf. also Mrs. Sinclair Stevenson, *The Heart of Jainism* (London, 1915), pp. 272 ff.

[11] Cf. our studies, *Yoga. Essai sur les origines de la mystique indienne* (Paris and Bucharest, 1936), pp. 166 ff.; and *Yoga: Immortality and Freedom* (English trans., New York and London, 1958), Ch. IV.





he must begin this same transitory existence and endure the same endless sufferings over again, millions upon millions of times; this results in intensifying his will to escape, that is, in impelling him to transcend his condition of "living being," once and for all.

Indian speculations on cyclical time reveal a sufficiently marked "refusal of history." But we must emphasize an aspect in which they differ fundamentally from archaic conceptions; whereas the man of the traditional cultures refuses history through the periodic abolition of the Creation, thus living over and over again in the atemporal instant of the beginnings, the Indian spirit, in its supreme tensions, disparages and even rejects this same reactualization of auroral time, which it no longer regards as an effective solution to the problem of suffering. The difference between the Vedic (hence archaic and primitive) vision and the Mahāyānic vision of the cosmic cycle is, in sum, the very difference that distinguishes the archetypal (traditional) anthropological position from the existentialist (historical) position. Karma, the law of universal causality, which by justifying the human condition and accounting for historical experience could be a source of consolation to the pre-Buddhistic Indian consciousness, becomes, in time, the very symbol of man's "slavery." Hence it is that every Indian metaphysics and technique, insofar as it proposes man's liberation, seeks the annihilation of karma. But if the doctrines of the cosmic cycles had been only an illustration of the theory of universal causality, we should not have mentioned them in the present context. The conception of the four yuga in fact contributes a new element: the explanation (and hence the justification) of historical catastrophes, of the progressive decadence of humanity, biologically, sociologically, ethically, and spiritually. Time, by the simple fact that it is duration, continually aggra-

vates the condition of the cosmos and, by implication, the condition of man. By the simple fact that we are now living in the Kali Yuga, hence in an "age of darkness," which progresses under the sign of disaggregation and must end by a catastrophe, it is our fate to suffer more than the men of preceding ages. Now, in *our* historical moment, we can expect nothing else; at most (and it is here that we glimpse the soteriological function of the Kali Yuga and the privileges conferred on us by a crepuscular and catastrophic history), we can wrest ourselves from cosmic servitude. The Indian theory of the four ages is, consequently, invigorating and consoling for man under the terror of history. In effect: (1) on the one hand, the sufferings that fall to him because he is contemporary with this crepuscular decomposition help him to understand the precariousness of his human condition and thus facilitate his enfranchisement; (2) on the other hand, the theory validates and justifies the sufferings of him who does not choose freedom but resigns himself to undergoing his existence, and this by the very fact that he is conscious of the dramatic and catastrophic structure of the epoch in which it has been given him to live (or, more precisely, to live again).

This second possibility for man to find his place in a "period of darkness," the close of a cycle, is of especial interest to us. It occurs, in fact, in other cultures and at other historical moments. To bear the burden of being contemporary with a disastrous period by becoming conscious of the position it occupies in the descending trajectory of the cosmic cycle is an attitude that was especially to demonstrate its effectiveness in the twilight of Greco-Oriental civilization.

We need not here concern ourselves with the many problems raised by the Orientalo-Hellenistic civilizations.





The only aspect that interests us is the *place* the man of these civilizations finds for himself in respect to history, and more especially as he confronts contemporary history. It is for this reason that we shall not linger over the origin, structure, and evolution of the various cosmological systems in which the antique myth of the cosmic cycles is elaborated and explored, nor over their philosophical consequences. We shall review these cosmological systems—from the pre-Socratics to the Neo-Pythagoreans—only insofar as they answer the following question: What is the meaning of history, that is, of the totality of the human experiences provoked by inevitable geographical conditions, social structures, political conjunctures, and so on? Let us remark at once that this question had meaning only for a very small minority during the period of the Orientalo-Hellenistic civilizations—only for those, that is, who had become dissociated from the horizon of antique spirituality. The immense majority of their contemporaries still lived, especially at the beginning of the period, under the dominance of archetypes; they emerged from it only very late (and perhaps never for good and all, as, for example, in the case of agricultural societies), during the course of the powerful historical tensions that were provoked by Alexander and hardly ended with the fall of Rome. But the philosophical myths and the more or less scientific cosmologies elaborated by this minority, which begins with the pre-Socratics, attained in time to very wide dissemination. What, in the fifth century B.C., was a gnosis accessible only with difficulty, four centuries later becomes a doctrine that consoles hundreds of thousands of men (witness, for example, Neo-Pythagoreanism and Neo-Stoicism in the Roman world). It is, to be sure, through the "success" that they obtained later, and not through their intrinsic worth, that all these Greek and Greco-Oriental

doctrines based upon the myth of cosmic cycles are of interest to us.

This myth was still discernibly present in the earliest pre-Socratic speculations. Anaximander knows that all things are born and return to the *apeiron*. Empedocles conceives of the alternate supremacy of the two opposing principles *philia* and *neikos* as explaining the eternal creations and destructions of the cosmos (a cycle in which four phases are distinguishable,[12] somewhat after the fashion of the four "incalculables" of Buddhist doctrine). The universal conflagration is, as we have seen, also accepted by Heraclitus. As to the eternal return—the periodic resumption, by all beings, of their former lives—this is one of the few dogmas of which we know with some certainty that they formed a part of primitive Pythagoreanism.[13] Finally, according to recent researches, admirably utilized and synthesized by Joseph Bidez,[14] it seems increasingly probable that at least certain elements of the Platonic system are of Irano-Babylonian origin.

We shall return to these possible Oriental influences. Let us pause for the moment to consider Plato's interpretation of the myth of cyclical return, more especially in the fundamental text, which occurs in the *Politicus*, 269*c* ff. Plato finds the cause of cosmic regression and cosmic catastrophes in a twofold motion of the universe: ". . . Of this Universe of ours, the Divinity now guides its circular revolution entirely, now abandons it to itself, once its revolutions have attained the duration which befits this universe; and it then begins to turn in the opposite direction, of its own motion . . ." This change of direction is

[12] Cf. Ettore Bignone, *Empedocle* (Turin, 1916), pp. 548 ff.

[13] Dicaearchos, cited by Porphyry, *Vita Pythagorae*, 19.

[14] *Éos, ou Platon et l'Orient* (Brussels, 1945), which takes into consideration especially the researches of Boll, Bezold, W. Gundel, W. Jaeger, A. Götze, J. Stenzel, and even Reitzenstein's interpretations despite the objections that some of them have aroused.





accompanied by gigantic cataclysms: "the greatest destruction, both among animals in general and among the human race, of which, as is fitting, only a few representatives remain" (270*c*). But this catastrophe is followed by a paradoxical "regeneration." Men begin to grow young again: "the white hair of the aged darkens," while those at the age of puberty begin to lessen in stature day by day, until they return to the size of a new-born infant; then finally, "still continuing to waste away, they wholly cease to be." The bodies of those who died at this time "disappeared completely, without leaving a trace, after a few days" (270*e*). It was then that the race of the "Sons of Earth" (*gegeneis*), whose memory was preserved by our ancestors, was born (271*a*). During this age of Cronos, there were neither savage animals nor enmity between animals (271*e*). The men of those days had neither wives nor children: "Upon arising out of the earth, they all returned to life, without preserving any memory of their former state of life." The trees gave them fruits in abundance and they slept naked on the soil, with no need for beds, because then the seasons were mild (272*a*).

The myth of the primordial paradise, evoked by Plato, discernible in Indian beliefs, was known to the Hebrews (for example, Messianic *illud tempus* in Isaiah 11 : 6, 8; 65 : 25) as well as to the Iranian (*Dênkart*, VII, 9, 3–5) and Greco-Latin traditions.[15] Moreover, it fits perfectly into the archaic (and probably universal) conception of "paradisal beginnings," which we find in all valuations of the primordial *illud tempus*. That Plato reproduces such traditional visions in the dialogues that date from his old age is nowise astonishing; the evolution of his philosophical thought itself forced him to rediscover the mythological

[15] Cf. Jérôme Carcopino, *Virgile et le mystère de la IV^e^ églogue* (rev. and enl. edn., Paris, 1943), pp. 72 ff.; Franz Cumont, "La Fin du monde selon les mages occidentaux," *Revue de l'Histoire des Religions* (Paris), Jan.–June, 1931, pp. 89 ff.

categories. The memory of the age of gold under Cronos was certainly available to him in Greek tradition (cf., for example, the four ages described by Hesiod, *Erga*, 110 ff.). This fact, however, constitutes no bar to our recognizing that there are also certain Babylonian influences in the *Politicus;* when, for example, Plato imputes periodic cataclysms to planetary revolutions, an explanation that certain recent researches [16] would derive from Babylonian astronomical speculations later rendered accessible to the Hellenic world through Berossus' *Babyloniaca*. According to the *Timaeus*, partial catastrophes are caused by planetary deviation (cf. *Timaeus*, 22*d* and 23*e*, deluge referred to by the priest of Saïs), while the moment of the meeting of all the planets is that of "perfect time" (*Timaeus*, 39*d*), that is, of the end of the Great Year. As Joseph Bidez remarks: "the idea that a conjunction of all the planets suffices to cause a universal upheaval is certainly of Chaldaean origin." [17] On the other hand, Plato seems also to have been familiar with the Iranian conception according to which the purpose of these catastrophes is the purification of the human race (*Timaeus*, 22*d*).

The Stoics, for their own purposes, also revived speculations concerning the cosmic cycles, emphasizing either eternal repetition [18] or the cataclysm, *ekpyrosis*, by which cosmic cycles come to their end.[19] Drawing from Heraclitus, or directly from Oriental gnosticism, Stoicism propagates all these ideas in regard to the Great Year and to the cosmic fire (*ekpyrosis*) that periodically puts an end to the universe in order to renew it. In time, these motifs of eternal return and of the end of the world come to domi-

[16] Bidez, p. 76.
[17] Ibid., p. 83.
[18] For example, Chrysippus, Fragments 623–27.
[19] As early as Zeno; see Fragments 98 and 109 (H. F. A. von Arnim, *Stoicorum veterum fragmenta*, I, Leipzig, 1921).





nate the entire Greco-Roman culture. The periodic renewal of the world (*metacosmesis*) was, furthermore, a favorite doctrine of Neo-Pythagoreanism, the philosophy that as Jérôme Carcopino has shown, together with Stoicism, divided the allegiance of Roman society in the second and first centuries B.C. But adherence to the myth of "eternal repetition," as well as to that of *apokatastasis* (the term entered the Hellenic world after Alexander the Great) are both philosophical positions in which we can perceive a very determined antihistorical attitude together with a will to defend oneself from history. We shall discuss both of these positions.

We observed in the preceding chapter that the myth of eternal repetition, as reinterpreted by Greek speculation, has the meaning of a supreme attempt toward the "staticization" of becoming, toward annulling the irreversibility of time. If all moments and all situations of the cosmos are repeated *ad infinitum*, their evanescence is, in the last analysis, patent; *sub specie infinitatis*, all moments and all situations remain stationary and thus acquire the ontological order of the archetype. Hence, among all the forms of becoming, historical becoming too is saturated with being. From the point of view of eternal repetition, historical events are transformed into categories and thus regain the ontological order they possessed in the horizon of archaic spirituality. In a certain sense it can even be said that the Greek theory of eternal return is the final variant undergone by the myth of the repetition of an archetypal gesture, just as the Platonic doctrine of Ideas was the final version of the archetype concept, and the most fully elaborated. And it is worth noting that these two doctrines found their most perfect expression at the height of Greek philosophical thought.

But it was especially the myth of universal conflagration

that achieved a marked success throughout the Greco-Oriental world. It appears more and more probable that the myth of an end of the world by fire, from which the good will escape unharmed, is of Iranian origin (cf., for example, *Bundahišn*, XXX, 18), at least in the form known to the "western mages" who, as Cumont has shown,[20] disseminated it in the West. Stoicism, the *Sibylline Oracles* (for example II, 253), and Judaeo-Christian literature make this myth the foundation of their apocalypses and their eschatology. Strange as it may seem, the myth was consoling. In fact, fire renews the world; through it will come the restoration of "a new world, free from old age, death, decomposition and corruption, living eternally, increasing eternally, when the dead shall rise, when immortality shall come to the living, when the world shall be perfectly renewed" (*Yašt*, XIX, 14, 89).[21] This, then, is an *apokatastasis* from which the good have nothing to fear. The final catastrophe will put an end to history, hence will restore man to eternity and beatitude.

Notable studies, by both Cumont and H. S. Nyberg,[22] have succeeded in illuminating some of the obscurity that surrounds Iranian eschatology and in defining the influences responsible for the Judaeo-Christian apocalypse. Like India (and, in a certain sense, Greece), Iran knew the myth of the four cosmic ages. A lost Mazdean text, the *Sudkar-nask* (whose content is preserved in the *Dênkart*, IX, 8), referred to the four ages: gold, silver, steel, and

[20] Op. cit., pp. 39 ff.

[21] After James Darmesteter's trans. in *Le Zend-Avesta* (Paris, 1892).

[22] Cf. Nyberg's "Questions de cosmogonie et de cosmologie mazdéennes," *Journal Asiatique* (Paris), CCXIV, CCXIX (1929, 1931). See also Scheftelowitz, op. cit.; R. C. Zaehner, "Zurvanica," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* (London), IX (1937–39), 303 ff., 573 ff., 871 ff.; H. H. Schaeder, "Der iranische Zeitgott und sein Mythos," *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* (Leipzig), XCV (1941), 268 ff.; Henry Corbin, "Cyclical Time in Mazdaism and Ismaïlism," in *Man and Time*, especially pp. 121 ff.





"mixed with iron." The same metals are mentioned at the beginning of the *Bahman-Yašt* (I, 3), which, however, somewhat further on (II, 14), describes a cosmic tree with seven branches (gold, silver, bronze, copper, tin, steel, and a "mixture of iron"), corresponding to the sevenfold mythical history of the Persians.[23] This cosmic hebdomad no doubt developed in connection with Chaldaean astrological teachings, each planet "governing" a millennium. But Mazdaism had much earlier proposed an age of 9,000 years (3 × 3,000) for the universe, while Zarvanism, as Nyberg has shown,[24] extended the maximum duration of this universe to 12,000 years. In the two Iranian systems—as, moreover, in all doctrines of cosmic cycles—the world will end by fire and water, *per pyrosim et cataclysmum*, as Firmicus Maternus (III, 1) was later to write. That in the Zarvanite system "unlimited time," *Zarvan akarana*, precedes and follows the 12,000 years of "limited time" created by Ormazd; that in this system "Time is more powerful than the two Creations," [25] that is, than the creations of Ormazd and Ahriman; that, consequently, *Zarvan akarana* was not created by Ormazd and hence is not subordinate to him—all these are matters that we need not enter into here. What we wish to emphasize is that, in the Iranian conception, history (whether followed or not by infinite time) is not eternal; it does not repeat itself but will come to an end one day by an eschatological *ekpyrosis* and cosmic cataclysm. For the final catastrophe that will put an end to history will at the same time be a judgment of history. It is then—*in illo tempore*—that, as we are told, all will render an account of what they have

[23] Cf. Cumont, op. cit., pp. 71 ff.

[24] Op. cit., pp. 41 ff., 285.

[25] *Bundahišn*, Ch. I (Nyberg, pp. 214–15).

done "in history" and only those who are not guilty will know beatitude and eternity.[26]

Windisch has shown the importance of these Mazdean ideas for the Christian apologist Lactantius.[27] God created the world in six days, and on the seventh he rested; hence the world will endure for six aeons, during which "evil will conquer and triumph" on earth. During the seventh millennium, the prince of demons will be chained and humanity will know a thousand years of rest and perfect justice. After this the demon will escape from his chains and resume war upon the just; but at last he will be vanquished and at the end of the eighth millennium the world will be re-created for eternity. Obviously, this division of history into three acts and eight millennia was also known to the Christian chiliasts,[28] but there can be no doubt that it is Iranian in structure, even if a similar eschatological vision of history was disseminated throughout the Mediterranean East and in the Roman Empire by Greco-Oriental gnosticisms.

A series of calamities will announce the approach of the end of the world; and the first of them will be the fall of Rome and the destruction of the Roman Empire, a frequent anticipation in the Judaeo-Christian apocalypse, but also not unknown to the Iranians.[29] The apocalyptic syndrome is, furthermore, common to all these traditions. Both Lactantius and the *Bahman-Yašt* announce that "the year will be shortened, the month will diminish, and the day will contract," [30] a vision of cosmic and human deterioration that we have also found in India (where human life decreases from 80,000 to 100 years) and that astrologi-

[26] The Oriental and Judaeo-Christian symbolism of passing through fire has recently been studied by C. M. Edsman, *Le Baptême de feu* (Uppsala, 1940).
[27] Cf. Cumont, pp. 68 ff.
[28] Ibid., p. 70, note 5.
[29] Ibid., p. 72.
[30] Texts in ibid., p. 78, note 1.





cal doctrines popularized in the Greco-Oriental world. Then the mountains will crumble and the earth become smooth, men will desire death and envy the dead, and but a tenth of them will survive. "It will be a time," writes Lactantius, "when justice will be rejected and innocence odious, when the wicked will prey as enemies upon the good, when neither law nor order nor military discipline will be observed, when none will respect gray hairs, or do the offices of piety, nor take pity upon women and children; all things will be confounded and mixed, against divine and natural law. . . ." [31] But after this premonitory phase, the purifying fire will come down to destroy the wicked and will be followed by the millennium of bliss that the Christian chiliasts also expected and Isaiah and the *Sibylline Oracles* had earlier foretold. Men will know a new golden age that will last until the end of the seventh millennium; for after this last conflict, a universal *ekpyrosis* will absorb the whole universe in fire, thus permitting the birth of a new world, an eternal world of justice and happiness, not subject to astral influences and freed from the dominion of time.

The Hebrews likewise limited the duration of the world to seven millennia,[32] but the rabbinate never encouraged mathematical calculations to determine the end of the world. They confined themselves to stating that a series of cosmic and historical calamities (famines, droughts, wars, and so forth) would announce the end of the world. The Messiah would come; the dead would rise again (Isaiah 26 : 19); God would conquer death and the renewal of the world would follow (Isaiah 65 : 17; Book of Jubilees I : 29, even speaks of a new Creation).[33]

[31] *Divinae Institutiones*, VII, 17, 9; Cumont, p. 81.
[32] Cf., for example, *Testamentum Abrahami*, *Ethica Enochi*, etc.
[33] On cosmic signs presaging the Messiah in rabbinical literature, see Raphael Patai, *Man and Temple* (London, 1947), pp. 203 ff.

Here again, as everywhere in the apocalyptic doctrines referred to above, we find the traditional motif of extreme decadence, of the triumph of evil and darkness, which precede the change of aeon and the renewal of the cosmos. A Babylonian text translated by A. Jeremias [34] thus foresees the apocalypse: "When such and such things happen in heaven, then will the clear become dull, the pure dirty, the lands will fall into confusion, prayers will not be heard, the signs of the prophets will become unfavorable. . . . Under his [i.e., a prince who does not obey the commands of the gods] rule the one will devour the other, the people will sell their children for gold, the husband will desert his wife, the wife her husband, the mother will bolt the door against her daughter." Another hymn foretells that, in those days, the sun will no longer rise, the moon no longer appear, and so on.

In the Babylonian conception, however, this crepuscular period is always followed by a new paradisal dawn. Frequently, as we should expect, the paradisal period opens with the enthronement of a new sovereign. Ashurbanipal regards himself as a regenerator of the cosmos, for "since the time the gods in their friendliness did set me on the throne of my fathers, Ramman has sent forth his rain . . . the harvest was plentiful, the corn was abundant . . . the cattle multiplied exceedingly." Nebuchadrezzar says of himself: "A reign of abundance, years of exuberance in my country I cause to be." In a Hittite text, Murshilish thus describes the reign of his father: ". . . under him the whole land of Katti prospered, and in his time people, cattle, sheep multiplied." [35] The conception is archaic and

[34] Hastings, I, p. 187.

[35] Ivan Engnell, *Studies in Divine Kingship in the Ancient Near East* (Uppsala, 1943), pp. 43, 44, 68; Jeremias, *Handbuch*, pp. 32 ff.





universal: we find it in Homer, in Hesiod, in the Old Testament, in China, and elsewhere.[36]

Simplifying, we might say that, among the Iranians as among the Jews and Christians, the "history" apportioned to the universe is limited, and that the end of the world coincides with the destruction of sinners, the resurrection of the dead, and the victory of eternity over time. But although this doctrine becomes increasingly popular during the first century B.C. and the early centuries of our era, it does not succeed in finally doing away with the traditional doctrine of periodic regeneration of the world through annual repetition of the Creation. We saw in the preceding chapter that vestiges of this latter doctrine were preserved among the Iranians until far into the Middle Ages. Similarly dominant in pre-Messianic Judaism, it was never totally eliminated, for rabbinic circles hesitated to be precise as to the duration that God had fixed for the cosmos and confined themselves to declaring that the *illud tempus* would certainly arrive one day. In Christianity, on the other hand, the evangelical tradition itself implies that *βασίλεια τοῦ θεοῦ* is already present "among" (*ἐντός*) those who believe, and that hence the *illud tempus* is eternally of the present and accessible to anyone, at any moment, through *metanoia*. Since what is involved is a religious experience wholly different from the traditional experience, since what is involved is faith, Christianity translates the periodic regeneration of the world into a regeneration of the human individual. But for him who shares in this eternal *nunc* of the reign of God, history ceases as totally as it does for the man of the archaic cultures, who abolishes it periodically. Consequently, for the

[36] *Odyssey*, XIX, 108 ff.; Hesiod, *Erga*, 225–27; our *Patterns in Comparative Religion*, pp. 255 ff.; Patai, p. 180 (rabbinical literature); Léon Wieger, *Histoire des croyances religieuses et des opinions philosophiques en Chine* (Hsien-hsien, 1922), p. 64.

Christian too, history can be regenerated, by and through each individual believer, even before the Saviour's second coming, when it will utterly cease for all Creation.

An adequate discussion of the revolution that Christianity introduced into the dialectic of the abolition of history, and of the escape from the ascendancy of time, would lead us too far beyond the limits of this essay. Let us simply note that even within the frame of the three great religious—Iranian, Judaic, and Christian—that have limited the duration of the cosmos to some specific number of millennia and affirm that history will finally cease *in illo tempore*, there still survive certain traces of the ancient doctrine of the periodic regeneration of history. In other words, history can be abolished, and consequently renewed, a number of times, before the final *eschaton* is realized. Indeed, the Christian liturgical year is based upon a periodic and real repetition of the Nativity, Passion, death, and Resurrection of Jesus, with all that this mystical drama implies for a Christian; that is, personal and cosmic regeneration through reactualization *in concreto* of the birth, death, and resurrection of the Saviour.

## Destiny and History

We have referred to all these Hellenistic-Oriental doctrines relative to cosmic cycles for only one purpose—that of discovering the answer to the question that we posed at the beginning of this chapter: How has man tolerated history? The answer is discernible in each individual system: His very place in the cosmic cycle—whether the cycle be capable of repetition or not—lays upon man a certain historical destiny. We must beware of seeing no more here than a fatalism, whatever meaning we ascribe to the term,





that would account for the good and bad fortune of each individual taken separately. These doctrines answer the questions posed by the destiny of contemporary history in its entirety, not only those posed by the individual destiny. A certain quantity of suffering is in store for humanity (and by the word "humanity" each person means the mass of men known to himself) by the simple fact that humanity finds itself at a certain historical moment, that is, in a cosmic cycle that is in its descending phase or nearing its end. Individually, each is free to withdraw from this historical moment and to console himself for its baneful consequences, whether through philosophy or through mysticism. (The mere mention of the swarm of gnosticisms, sects, mysteries, and philosophies that overran the Mediterranean-Oriental world during the centuries of historical tension will suffice to give an idea of the vastly increasing proportion of those who attempted to withdraw from history.) The historical moment in its totality, however, could not avoid the destiny that was the inevitable consequence of its very position upon the descending trajectory of the cycle to which it belonged. Just as, in the Indian view, every man of the Kali Yuga is stimulated to seek his freedom and spiritual beatitude, yet at the same time cannot avoid the final dissolution of this crepuscular world in its entirety, so, in the view of the various systems to which we have referred, the historical moment, despite the possibilities of escape it offers contemporaries, can never, in its entirety, be anything but tragic, pathetic, unjust, chaotic, as any moment that heralds the final catastrophe must be.

In fact, a common characteristic relates all the cyclical systems scattered through the Hellenistic-Oriental world: in the view of each of them, the contemporary historical moment (whatever its chronological position) represents

a decadence in relation to preceding historical moments. Not only is the contemporary aeon inferior to the other ages (gold, silver, and so on) but, even within the frame of the reigning age (that is, of the reigning cycle), the "instant" in which man lives grows worse as time passes. This tendency toward devaluation of the contemporary moment should not be regarded as a sign of pessimism. On the contrary, it reveals an excess of optimism, for, in the deterioration of the contemporary situation, at least a portion of mankind saw signs foretelling the regeneration that must necessarily follow. Since the days of Isaiah, a series of military defeats and political collapses had been anxiously awaited as an ineluctable syndrome of the Messianic *illud tempus* that was to regenerate the world.

However, different as were the possible positions of man, they displayed one common characteristic: history could be tolerated, not only because it had a meaning but also because it was, in the last analysis, necessary. For those who believed in a repetition of an entire cosmic cycle, as for those who believed only in a single cycle nearing its end, the drama of contemporary history was necessary and inevitable. Plato, even in his day, and despite his acceptance of some of the schemata of Chaldaean astrology, was profuse in his sarcasms against those who had fallen into astrological fatalism or who believed in an eternal repetition in the strict (Stoic) sense of the term (cf., for example, *Republic*, VIII, 546 ff.). As for the Christian philosophers, they fiercely combated the same astrological fatalism,[37] which had increased during the last

[37] Among many other liberations, Christianity effected liberation from astral destiny: "We are above Fate," Tatian writes (*Oratio ad Graecos*, 9), summing up Christian doctrine. "The sun and the moon were made for us; how am I to worship what are my servitors" (ibid., 4). Cf. also St. Augustine, *De civitate Dei*, XII, Ch. X–XIII; on the ideas of St. Basil, Origen, St. Gregory, and St. Augustine, and their opposition to cyclical theories, see Pierre Duhem, *Le Système du monde* (Paris, 1913–17), II, pp. 446 ff. See also Henri-Charles Puech, "Gnosis and Time," in *Man and Time*, pp. 38 ff.





centuries of the Roman Empire. As we shall see in a moment, Saint Augustine will defend the idea of a perennial Rome solely to escape from accepting a *fatum* determined by cyclical theories. It is, nevertheless, true that astrological fatalism itself accounted for the course of historical events, and hence helped the contemporary to understand them and tolerate them, just as successfully as did the various Greco-Oriental gnosticisms, Neo-Stoicism, and Neo-Pythagoreanism. For example, whether history was governed by the movements of the heavenly bodies or purely and simply by the cosmic process, which necessarily demanded a disintegration inevitably linked to an original integration, whether, again, it was subject to the will of God, a will that the prophets had been able to glimpse, the result was the same: none of the catastrophes manifested in history was arbitrary. Empires rose and fell; wars caused innumerable sufferings; immorality, dissoluteness, social injustice, steadily increased—because all this was necessary, that is, was willed by the cosmic rhythm, by the demiurge, by the constellations, or by the will of God.

In this view, the history of Rome takes on a noble gravity. Several times in the course of their history, the Romans underwent the terror of an imminent end to their city, whose duration—as they believed—had been determined at the very moment of its foundation by Romulus. In *Les Grands Mythes de Rome*, Jean Hubaux has penetratingly analyzed the critical moments of the drama provoked by the uncertainties in calculations of the "life" of Rome, while Jérôme Carcopino has recorded the historical events and the spiritual tension that justified the hope for a noncatastrophic resurrection of the city.[38] At every historical crisis two crepuscular myths obsessed the Roman people: (1) the life of the city is ended, its duration being limited to a certain number of years (the "mystic number"

[38] Jean Hubaux, *Les Grands Mythes de Rome* (Paris, 1945); Carcopino, op. cit.

revealed by the twelve eagles seen by Romulus); and (2) the Great Year will put an end to all history, hence to that of Rome, by a universal *ekpyrosis*. Roman history itself undertook to show the baselessness of these fears, down to a very late period. For at the end of 120 years after the foundation of Rome, it was realized that the twelve eagles seen by Romulus did not signify 120 years of historical life for the city, as many had feared. At the end of 365 years, it became apparent that there was no question of a Great Year, in which each year of the city would be equivalent to a day, and it was supposed that destiny had granted Rome another kind of Great Year, composed of twelve months of 100 years. As for the myth of regressive "ages" and eternal return, professed by the Sibyl and interpreted by the philosophers through their theories of cosmic cycles, it was more than once hoped that the transition from one age to the other could be effected without a universal *ekpyrosis*. But this hope was always mingled with anxiety. Each time historical events accentuated their catastrophic rhythm, the Romans believed that the Great Year was on the point of ending and that Rome was on the eve of her fall. When Caesar crossed the Rubicon, Nigidius Figulus foresaw the beginning of a cosmico-historical drama which would put an end to Rome and the human race.[39] But the same Nigidius Figulus believed [40] that an *ekpyrosis* was not inevitable, and that a renewal, the Neo-Pythagorean *metacosmesis*, was also possible without a cosmic catastrophe—an idea that Virgil was to take up and elaborate.

Horace, in his *Epode XVI*, had been unable to conceal his fear as to the future fate of Rome. The Stoics, the astrologers, and Oriental gnosticism saw in the wars and calamities of the time signs that the final catastrophe was

[39] Lucan, *Pharsalia*, 639, 642–45; Carcopino, p. 147.
[40] Ibid., pp. 52 ff.





imminent. Reasoning either from calculation of the life of Rome or from the doctrine of cosmico-historical cycles, the Romans knew that, whatever else might happen, the city was fated to disappear before the beginning of a new aeon. But the reign of Augustus, coming after a series of long and sanguinary civil wars, seemed to inaugurate a *pax aeterna*. The fears inspired by the two myths—the "age" of Rome and the theory of the Great Year—now proved groundless: "Augustus has founded Rome anew and we have nothing to fear as to its life," those who had been concerned over the mystery of Romulus' twelve eagles could assure themselves. "The transition from the age of iron to the age of gold has been accomplished without an *ekpyrosis*," those who had been obsessed by the theory of cycles could say. Thus Virgil, for the last *saeculum*, that of the sun, which was to bring about the combustion of the universe, could substitute the *saeculum* of Apollo, avoiding an *ekpyrosis* and assuming that the recent wars had themselves been the sign of the transition from the age of iron to the age of gold.[41] Later, when Augustus' reign seemed indeed to have inaugurated the age of gold, Virgil undertook to reassure the Romans as to the duration of the city. In the *Aeneid* (I, 255 ff.) Jupiter, addressing Venus, assures her that he will lay no bounds of space or time upon the Romans: "empire without end have I given them." [42] And it was not until after the publication of the *Aeneid* that Rome was called *urbs aeterna*, Augustus being proclaimed the second founder of the city. His birthday, September 23, was regarded "as the point of departure of the Universe, whose existence had been saved, and whose face had been changed, by Augustus." [43] Then arose the hope that Rome

[41] Cf. ibid., p. 45, etc.
[42] "His ego nec metas rerum nec tempora pono: imperium sine fine dedi"; cf. Hubaux, p. 128 ff.
[43] Carcopino, p. 200.

could regenerate itself periodically *ad infinitum*. Thus it was that, liberated from the myths of the twelve eagles and of the *ekpyrosis*, Rome could increase until, as Virgil foretells, it embraced even the regions "beyond the paths of the sun and the year" ("extra anni solisque vias").

In all this, as we see, there is a supreme effort to liberate history from astral destiny or from the law of cosmic cycles and to return, through the myth of the eternal renewal of Rome, to the archaic myth of the annual (and in particular the noncatastrophic!) regeneration of the cosmos through its eternal re-creation by the sovereign or the priest. It is above all an attempt to give value to history on the cosmic plane; that is, to regard historical events and catastrophes as genuine cosmic combustions or dissolutions that must periodically put an end to the universe in order to permit its regeneration. The wars, the destruction, the sufferings of history are no longer the premonitory signs of the transition from one age to another, but themselves constitute the transition. Thus in each period of peace, history renews itself and, consequently, a new world begins; in the last analysis (as we saw in the case of the myth built up around Augustus), the sovereign repeats the Creation of the cosmos.

We have adduced the example of Rome to show how historical events could be given value by the expedient of the myths examined in the present chapter. Adapted to a particular myth theory (age of Rome, Great Year), catastrophes could not only be tolerated by their contemporaries but also *positively* accorded a value immediately after their appearance. Of course, the age of gold inaugurated by Augustus has survived only through what it created in Latin culture. Augustus was no sooner dead than history undertook to belie the age of gold, and once again people began living in expectation of imminent disaster. When





Rome was occupied by Alaric, it seemed that the sign of Romulus' twelve eagles had triumphed: the city was entering its twelfth and last century of existence. Only Saint Augustine attempted to show that no one could know the moment at which God would decide to put an end to history, and that in any case, although cities by their very nature have a limited duration, the only "eternal city" being that of God, no astral destiny can decide the life or death of a nation. Thus Christian thought tended to transcend, once and for all, the old themes of eternal repetition, just as it had undertaken to transcend all the other archaic viewpoints by revealing the importance of the religious experience of faith and that of the value of the human personality.

CHAPTER FOUR

# THE TERROR OF HISTORY

*Survival of the Myth of Eternal Return · The Difficulties of Historicism · Freedom and History · Despair or Faith*

*

# Survival of the Myth of Eternal Return

THE problem raised in this final chapter exceeds the limits that we had assigned to the present essay. Hence we can only outline it. In short, it would be necessary to confront "historical man" (modern man), who consciously and voluntarily creates history, with the man of the traditional civilizations, who, as we have seen, had a negative attitude toward history. Whether he abolishes it periodically, whether he devaluates it by perpetually finding transhistorical models and archetypes for it, whether, finally, he gives it a metahistorical meaning (cyclical theory, eschatological significations, and so on), the man of the traditional civilizations accorded the historical event no value in itself; in other words, he did not regard it as a specific category of his own mode of existence. Now, to compare these two types of humanity implies an analysis of all the modern "historicisms," and such an analysis, to be really useful, would carry us too far from the principal theme of this study. We are nevertheless forced to touch upon the problem of man as consciously and voluntarily historical, because the modern world is, at the present moment, not entirely converted to historicism; we are even witnessing a conflict between the two views: the archaic conception, which we should designate as archetypal and anhistorical; and the modern, post-Hegelian conception, which seeks to be historical. We shall confine ourselves to examining only one aspect of the problem, but an important aspect: the solutions offered by the historicistic view to enable modern man to tolerate the increasingly powerful pressure of contemporary history.

The foregoing chapters have abundantly illustrated the way in which men of the traditional civilizations tolerated

history. The reader will remember that they defended themselves against it, either by periodically abolishing it through repetition of the cosmogony and a periodic regeneration of time or by giving historical events a metahistorical meaning, a meaning that was not only consoling but was above all coherent, that is, capable of being fitted into a well-consolidated system in which the cosmos and man's existence had each its *raison d'être*. We must add that this traditional conception of a defense against history, this way of tolerating historical events, continued to prevail in the world down to a time very close to our own; and that it still continues to console the agricultural (= traditional) societies of Europe, which obstinately adhere to an anhistorical position and are, by that fact, exposed to the violent attacks of all revolutionary ideologies. The Christianity of the popular European strata never succeeded in abolishing either the theory of the archetype (which transformed a historical personage into an exemplary hero and a historical event into a mythical category) or the cyclical and astral theories (according to which history was justified, and the sufferings provoked by it assumed an eschatological meaning). Thus—to give only a few examples—the barbarian invaders of the High Middle Ages were assimilated to the Biblical archetype Gog and Magog and thus received an ontological status and an eschatological function. A few centuries later, Christians were to regard Genghis Khan as a new David, destined to accomplish the prophecies of Ezekiel. Thus interpreted, the sufferings and catastrophes provoked by the appearance of the barbarians on the medieval historical horizon were "tolerated" by the same process that, some thousands of years earlier, had made it possible to tolerate the terrors of history in the ancient East. It is such justifications of historical catastrophes that today still make life possible for tens of mil-





lions of men, who continue to recognize, in the unremitting pressure of events, signs of the divine will or of an astral fatality.

If we turn to the other traditional conception—that of cyclical time and the periodic regeneration of history, whether or not it involves the myth of eternal repetition—we find that, although the earliest Christian writers began by violently opposing it, it nevertheless in the end made its way into Christian philosophy. We must remind ourselves that, for Christianity, time is real because it has a meaning—the Redemption. "A straight line traces the course of humanity from initial Fall to final Redemption. And the meaning of this history is unique, because the Incarnation is a unique fact. Indeed, as Chapter 9 of the Epistle to the Hebrews and I Peter 3 : 18 emphasize, Christ died for our sins once only, once for all (*hapax*, *ephapax*, *semel*); it is not an event subject to repetition, which can be reproduced several times (*pollakis*). The development of history is thus governed and oriented by a unique fact, a fact that stands entirely alone. Consequently the destiny of all mankind, together with the individual destiny of each one of us, are both likewise played out once, once for all, in a concrete and irreplaceable time which is that of history and life." [1] It is this linear conception of time and history, which, already outlined in the second century by St. Irenaeus of Lyon, will be taken up again by St. Basil and St. Gregory and be finally elaborated by St. Augustine.

But despite the reaction of the orthodox Fathers, the theories of cycles and of astral influences on human destiny and historical events were accepted, at least in part, by

[1] Henri-Charles Puech, "Gnosis and Time," in *Man and Time* (New York and London, 1957), pp. 48 ff. Cf. also the same author's "Temps, histoire et mythe dans le christianisme des premiers siècles," *Proceedings of the VIIth Congress for the History of Religion* (Amsterdam, 1951), pp. 33–52.

other Fathers and ecclesiastical writers, such as Clement of Alexandria, Minucius Felix, Arnobius, and Theodoret. The conflict between these two fundamental conceptions of time and history continued into the seventeenth century. We cannot even consider recapitulating the admirable analyses made by Pierre Duhem and Lynn Thorndike, and resumed and completed by Pitirim Sorokin.[2] We must remind the reader that, at the height of the Middle Ages, cyclical and astral theories begin to dominate historiological and eschatological speculation. Already popular in the twelfth century,[3] they undergo systematic elaboration in the next, especially after the appearance of translations from Arabic writers.[4] Increasingly precise correlations are attempted between the cosmic and the geographical factors involved and the respective periodicities (in the direction already indicated by Ptolemy, in the second century of our era, in his *Tetrabiblos*). An Albertus Magnus, a St. Thomas, a Roger Bacon, a Dante (*Convivio*, II, Ch. 14), and many others believe that the cycles and periodicities of the world's history are governed by the influence of the stars, whether this influence obeys the will of God and is his instrument in history or whether—a hypothesis that gains increasing adherence—it is regarded as a force immanent in the cosmos.[5] In short, to adopt Sorokin's formulation, the Middle Ages are dominated by the eschatological conception (in its two essential moments: the creation and the end of the world), complemented by the theory of cyclic undulation that explains the periodic return of events. This twofold dogma dominates speculation down to the seventeenth century, although, at the same time, a theory of

[2] Pierre Duhem, *Le Système du monde* (Paris, 1913–17); Lynn Thorndike, *A History of Magic and Experimental Science* (New York, 1929–41); Pitirim A. Sorokin, *Social and Cultural Dynamics*, II (New York, 1937–41).

[3] Thorndike, I, pp. 455 ff.; Sorokin, p. 371.

[4] Duhem, V, pp. 223 ff.

[5] Ibid., pp. 225 ff.; Thorndike, II, pp. 267 ff., 416 ff., etc.; Sorokin, p. 371.





the linear progress of history begins to assert itself. In the Middle Ages, the germs of this theory can be recognized in the writings of Albertus Magnus and St. Thomas; but it is with the *Eternal Gospel* of Joachim of Floris that it appears in all its coherence, as an integral element of a magnificent eschatology of history, the most significant contribution of Christianity in this field since St. Augustine's. Joachim of Floris divides the history of the world into three great epochs, successively inspired and dominated by a different person of the Trinity: Father, Son, Holy Ghost. In the Calabrian abbot's vision, each of these epochs reveals, in history, a new dimension of the divinity and, by this fact, allows humanity to perfect itself progressively until finally, in the last phase—inspired by the Holy Ghost—it arrives at absolute spiritual freedom.[6]

But, as we said, the tendency which gains increasing adherence is that of an immanentization of the cyclical theory. Side by side with voluminous astrological treatises, the considerations of scientific astronomy assert themselves. So it is that in the theories of Tycho Brahe, Kepler, Cardano, Giordano Bruno, or Campanella, the cyclical ideology survives beside the new conception of linear progress professed, for example, by a Francis Bacon or a Pascal. From the seventeenth century on, linearism and the progressivistic conception of history assert themselves more and more, inaugurating faith in an infinite progress, a faith already proclaimed by Leibniz, predominant in the century of "enlightenment," and popularized in the nine-

[6] It was a real tragedy for the Western world that Joachim of Floris' prophetico-eschatological speculations, though they inspired and fertilized the thought of a St. Francis of Assisi, of a Dante, and of a Savonarola, so quickly sank into oblivion, the Calabrian monk surviving only as a name to which could be attached a multitude of apocryphal writings. The immanence of spiritual freedom, not only in respect to dogma but also in respect to society (a freedom that Joachim conceived as a necessity of both divine and historical dialectics), was again professed, at a later period, by the ideologies of the Reformation and the Renaissance, but in entirely different terms and in accordance with different spiritual views.

teenth century by the triumph of the ideas of the evolutionists. We must wait until our own century to see the beginnings of certain new reactions against this historical linearism and a certain revival of interest in the theory of cycles; [7] so it is that, in political economy, we are witnessing the rehabilitation of the notions of cycle, fluctuation, periodic oscillation; that in philosophy the myth of eternal return is revivified by Nietzsche; or that, in the philosophy of history, a Spengler or a Toynbee concern themselves with the problem of periodicity.[8]

In connection with this rehabilitation of cyclical conceptions, Sorokin rightly observes [9] that present theories concerning the death of the universe do not exclude the hypothesis of the creation of a new universe, somewhat after the fashion of the Great Year in Greco-Oriental speculation or of the yuga cycle in the thought of India (see above, pp. 113 ff.). Basically, it may be said that it is only in the cyclical theories of modern times that the meaning of the archaic myth of eternal repetition realizes its full implications. For the medieval cyclical theories confined themselves to justifying the periodicity of events by giving them an integral place in the rhythms of the cosmos and the fatalities of the stars. They thereby also implicitly affirmed the cyclical repetition of the events of history, even when this repetition was not regarded as continuing *ad infinitum*. Even more: by the fact that historical events depended upon cycles and astral situations, they became intelligible and even foreseeable, since they thus acquired a transcend-

[7] Sorokin, pp. 379 ff.

[8] Cf. A. Rey, *Le Retour éternel et la philosophie de la physique* (Paris, 1927); Pitirim A. Sorokin, *Contemporary Sociological Theories* (New York, 1928), pp. 728–41; Arnold J. Toynbee, *A Study of History*, III (London, 1934); Ellsworth Huntington, *Mainsprings of Civilization* (New York, 1945), especially pp. 453 ff.; Jean Claude Antoine, "L'Éternel Retour de l'histoire deviendra-t-il objet de science?," *Critique* (Paris), XXVII (Aug., 1948), 723 ff.

[9] Sorokin, p. 383, note 80.





ent *model;* the wars, famines, and wretchedness provoked by contemporary history were at most only the repetition of an archetype, itself determined by the stars and by celestial norms from which the divine will was not always absent. As at the close of antiquity, these new expressions of the myth of eternal return were above all appreciated among the intellectual elites and especially consoled those who directly suffered the pressure of history. The peasant masses, in antiquity as in modern times, took less interest in cyclical and astral formulas; indeed, they found their consolation and support in the concept of archetypes and repetition, a concept that they "lived" less on the plane of the cosmos and the stars than on the mythico-historical level (transforming, for example, historical personages into exemplary heroes, historical events into mythical categories, and so on, in accordance with the dialectic which we defined above, pp. 37 ff.).

## The Difficulties of Historicism

The reappearance of cyclical theories in contemporary thought is pregnant with meaning. Incompetent as we are to pass judgment upon their validity, we shall confine ourselves to observing that the formulation, in modern terms, of an archaic myth betrays at least the desire to find a meaning and a transhistorical justification for historical events. Thus we find ourselves once again in the pre-Hegelian position, the validity of the "historicistic" solutions, from Hegel to Marx, being implicitly called into question. From Hegel on, every effort is directed toward saving and conferring value on the historical event as such, the event in itself and for itself. In his study of the German Constitution, Hegel wrote that if we recognize that things

are necessarily as they are, that is, that they are not arbitrary and not the result of chance, we shall at the same time recognize that they *must* be as they are. A century later, the concept of historical necessity will enjoy a more and more triumphant practical application: in fact, all the cruelties, aberrations, and tragedies of history have been, and still are, justified by the necessities of the "historical moment." Probably Hegel did not intend to go so far. But since he had resolved to reconcile himself with his own historical moment, he was obliged to see in every event the will of the Universal Spirit. This is why he considered "reading the morning papers a sort of realistic benediction of the morning." For him, only daily contact with events could orient man's conduct in his relations with the world and with God.

How could Hegel know what was *necessary* in history, what, consequently, must occur exactly as it had occurred? Hegel believed that he knew what the Universal Spirit wanted. We shall not insist upon the audacity of this thesis, which, after all, abolishes precisely what Hegel wanted to save in history—human freedom. But there is an aspect of Hegel's philosophy of history that interests us because it still preserves something of the Judaeo-Christian conception: for Hegel, the historical event was the manifestation of the Universal Spirit. Now, it is possible to discern a parallel between Hegel's philosophy of history and the theology of history of the Hebrew prophets: for the latter, as for Hegel, an event is irreversible and valid in itself inasmuch as it is a new manifestation of the will of God—a proposition really revolutionary, we should remind ourselves, from the viewpoint of traditional societies dominated by the eternal repetition of archetypes. Thus, in Hegel's view, the destiny of a people still preserved a transhistorical significance, because all history revealed a





new and more perfect manifestation of the Universal Spirit. But with Marx, history cast off all transcendental significance; it was no longer anything more than the epiphany of the class struggle. To what extent could such a theory justify historical sufferings? For the answer, we have but to turn to the pathetic resistance of a Belinsky or a Dostoevski, for example, who asked themselves how, from the viewpoint of the Hegelian and Marxian dialectic, it was possible to redeem all the dramas of oppression, the collective sufferings, deportations, humiliations, and massacres that fill universal history.

Yet Marxism preserves a meaning to history. For Marxism, events are not a succession of arbitrary accidents; they exhibit a coherent structure and, above all, they lead to a definite end—final elimination of the terror of history, "salvation." Thus, at the end of the Marxist philosophy of history, lies the age of gold of the archaic eschatologies. In this sense it is correct to say not only that Marx "brought Hegel's philosophy back to earth" but also that he reconfirmed, upon an exclusively human level, the value of the primitive myth of the age of gold, with the difference that he puts the age of gold only at the end of history, instead of putting it at the beginning too. Here, for the militant Marxist, lies the secret of the remedy for the terror of history: just as the contemporaries of a "dark age" consoled themselves for their increasing sufferings by the thought that the aggravation of evil hastens final deliverance, so the militant Marxist of our day reads, in the drama provoked by the pressure of history, a necessary evil, the premonitory symptom of the approaching victory that will put an end forever to all historical "evil."

The terror of history becomes more and more intolerable from the viewpoints afforded by the various historicistic philosophies. For in them, of course, every

historical event finds its full and only meaning in its realization alone. We need not here enter into the theoretical difficulties of historicism, which already troubled Rickert, Troeltsch, Dilthey, and Simmel, and which the recent efforts of Croce, of Karl Mannheim, or of Ortega y Gasset have but partially overcome.[10] This essay does not require us to discuss either the philosophical value of historicism as such or the possibility of establishing a "philosophy of history" that should definitely transcend relativism. Dilthey himself, at the age of seventy, recognized that "the relativity of all human concepts is the last word of the historical vision of the world." In vain did he proclaim an *allgemeine Lebenserfahrung* as the final means of transcending this relativity. In vain did Meinecke invoke "examination of conscience" as a transsubjective experience capable of transcending the relativity of historical life. Heidegger had gone to the trouble of showing that the historicity of human existence forbids all hope of transcending time and history.

For our purpose, only one question concerns us: How can the "terror of history" be tolerated from the viewpoint of historicism? Justification of a historical event by the simple fact that it is a historical event, in other words, by the simple fact that it "happened that way," will not go far toward freeing humanity from the terror that the event inspires. Be it understood that we are not here concerned with the problem of evil, which, from whatever

[10] Let us say, first of all, that the terms "historism" or "historicism" cover many different and antagonistic philosophical currents and orientations. It is enough to recall Dilthey's vitalistic relativism, Croce's *storicismo*, Gentile's *attualismo*, and Ortega's "historical reason" to realize the multiplicity of philosophical valuations accorded to history during the first half of the twentieth century. For Croce's present position, see his *La storia come pensiero e come azione* (Bari, 1938; 7th rev. edn., 1965). Also J. Ortega y Gasset, *Historia como sistema* (Madrid, 1941); Karl Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia* (trans. by Louis Wirth and Edward Shils, New York, 1936). On the problem of history, see also Pedro Lain Entralgo, *Medicina e historia* (Madrid, 1941); and Karl Löwith, *Meaning in History* (Chicago, 1949).





angle it be viewed, remains a philosophical and religious problem; we are concerned with the problem of history as history, of the "evil" that is bound up not with man's condition but with his behavior toward others. We should wish to know, for example, how it would be possible to tolerate, and to justify, the sufferings and annihilation of so many peoples who suffer and are annihilated for the simple reason that their geographical situation sets them in the pathway of history; that they are neighbors of empires in a state of permanent expansion. How justify, for example, the fact that southeastern Europe had to suffer for centuries—and hence to renounce any impulse toward a higher historical existence, toward spiritual creation on the universal plane—for the sole reason that it happened to be on the road of the Asiatic invaders and later the neighbor of the Ottoman Empire? And in our day, when historical pressure no longer allows any escape, how can man tolerate the catastrophes and horrors of history—from collective deportations and massacres to atomic bombings —if beyond them he can glimpse no sign, no transhistorical meaning; if they are only the blind play of economic, social, or political forces, or, even worse, only the result of the "liberties" that a minority takes and exercises directly on the stage of universal history?

We know how, in the past, humanity has been able to endure the sufferings we have enumerated: they were regarded as a punishment inflicted by God, the syndrome of the decline of the "age," and so on. And it was possible to accept them precisely because they had a metahistorical meaning, because, for the greater part of mankind, still clinging to the traditional viewpoint, history did not have, and could not have, value in itself. Every hero repeated the archetypal gesture, every war rehearsed the struggle between good and evil, every fresh social injustice was

identificd with the suffcrings of the Saviour (or, for example, in thc pre-Christian world, with the passion of a divine mcssenger or vegetation god), each new massacre repcated thc glorious end of the martyrs. It is not our part to decidc whether such motives were pucrile or not, or whether such a refusal of history always proved efficacious. In our opinion, only one fact counts: by virtue of this view, tens of millions of men were able, for century after ccntury, to cndure great historical pressures without despairing, without committing suicide or falling into that spiritual aridity that always brings with it a relativistic or nihilistic view of history.

Moreover, as we have already observed, a very considerable fraction of the population of Europe, to say nothing of thc other continents, still lives today by the light of the traditional, anti-"historicistic" viewpoint. Hence it is above all the "elitcs" that are confronted with the problem, since they alone arc forced, and with increasing rigor, to take cognizance of their historical situation. It is true that Christianity and the eschatological philosophy of history have not ceased to satisfy a considerable proportion of these elites. Up to a certain point, and for certain individuals, it may be said that Marxism—especially in its popular forms—rcpresents a defense against the terror of history. Only the historicistic position, in all its varieties and shades—from Nietzsche's "dcstiny" to Heidegger's "temporality"—remains disarmed.[11] It is by no means mere fortuitious coincidence that, in this philoso-

[11] We take the liberty of emphasizing that "historicism" was created and professed above all by thinkers belonging to nations for which history has never been a continuous terror. These thinkers would perhaps have adopted another viewpoint had they belonged to nations marked by the "fatality of history." It would certainly be interesting, in any case, to know if the theory according to which everything that happens is "good," simply *because* it has happened, would have been accepted without qualms by the thinkers of the Baltic countries, of the Balkans, or of colonial territories.





phy, despair, the *amor fati*, and pessimism are elevated to the rank of heroic virtues and instruments of cognition.

Yet this position, although the most modern and, in a ccrtain scnse, almost the incvitable position for all thinkers who define man as a "historical being," has not yet made a definitive conquest of contemporary thought. Some pages earlier, we noted various rccent orientations that tend to reconfer value upon the myth of cyclical periodicity, even the myth of eternal return. These orientations disrcgard not only historicism but even history as such. We believe we arc justificd in seeing in them, rather than a resistance to history, a revolt against historical *time*, an attempt to restore this historical time, freighted as it is with human experience, to a place in the time that is cosmic, cyclical, and infinite. In any case it is worth noting that the work of two of the most significant writers of our day—T. S. Eliot and Jamcs Joyce—is saturated with nostalgia for the myth of eternal repetition and, in the last analysis, for the abolition of time. There is also reason to foresee that, as the terror of history grows worse, as existence becomes more and more precarious because of history, the positions of historicism will increasingly lose in prestige. And, at a moment when history could do what neither the cosmos, nor man, nor chance have yet succeeded in doing—that is, wipe out the human race in its entircty—it may be that we arc witnessing a desperate attempt to prohibit the "events of history" through a reintegration of human societies within the horizon (artificial, because decreed) of archetypes and their repetition. In other words, it is not inadmissible to think of an cpoch, and an epoch not too far distant, when humanity, to ensure its survival, will find itself reduced to desisting from any further "making" of history in the sense in which it began to make it from the creation of the first cmpires, will confine itsclf to rc-

peating prescribed archetypal gestures, and will strive to forget, as meaningless and dangerous, any spontaneous gesture which might entail "historical" consequences. It would even be interesting to compare the anhistorical solution of future societies with the paradisal or eschatological myths of the golden age of the beginning or the end of the world. But as we have it in mind to pursue these speculations elsewhere, let us now return to our problem: the position of historical man in relation to archaic man, and let us attempt to understand the objections brought against the latter on the basis of the historicistic view.

## Freedom and History

In his rejection of concepts of periodicity and hence, in the last analysis, of the archaic concepts of archetypes and repetition, we are, we believe, justified in seeing modern man's resistance to nature, the will of "historical man" to affirm his autonomy. As Hegel remarked, with noble self-assurance, nothing new ever occurs in nature. And the crucial difference between the man of the archaic civilizations and modern, historical man lies in the increasing value the latter gives to historical events, that is, to the "novelties" that, for traditional man, represented either meaningless conjunctures or infractions of norms (hence "faults," "sins," and so on) and that, as such, required to be expelled (abolished) periodically. The man who adopts the historical viewpoint would be justified in regarding the traditional conception of archetypes and repetition as an aberrant reidentification of history (that is, of "freedom" and "novelty") with nature (in which everything repeats itself). For, as modern man can observe, archetypes themselves constitute a "history" insofar as they are





made up of gestures, acts, and decrees that, although supposed to have been manifested *in illo tempore*, were nevertheless manifested, that is, came to birth in time, "took place," like any other historical event. Primitive myths often mention the birth, activity, and disappearance of a god or a hero whose "civilizing" gestures are thenceforth repeated *ad infinitum*. This comes down to saying that archaic man also knows a history, although it is a primordial history, placed in a mythical time. Archaic man's rejection of history, his refusal to situate himself in a concrete, historical time, would, then, be the symptom of a precocious weariness, a fear of movement and spontaneity; in short, placed between accepting the historical condition and its risks on the one hand, and his reidentification with the modes of nature on the other, he would choose such a reidentification.

In this total adherence, on the part of archaic man, to archetypes and repetition, modern man would be justified in seeing not only the primitives' amazement at their own first spontaneous and creative free gestures and their veneration, repeated *ad infinitum*, but also a feeling of guilt on the part of man hardly emerged from the paradise of animality (i.e., from nature), a feeling that urges him to reidentify with nature's eternal repetition the few primordial, creative, and spontaneous gestures that had signalized the appearance of freedom. Continuing his critique, modern man could even read in this fear, this hesitation or fatigue in the presence of any gesture without an archetype, nature's tendency toward equilibrium and rest; and he would read this tendency in the anticlimax that fatally follows upon any exuberant gesture of life and that some have gone so far as to recognize in the need felt by human reason to unify the real through knowledge. In the last analysis, modern man, who accepts history or claims to

accept it, can reproach archaic man, imprisoned within the mythical horizon of archetypes and repetition, with his creative impotence, or, what amounts to the same thing, his inability to accept the risks entailed by every creative act. For the modern man can be creative only insofar as he is historical; in other words, all creation is forbidden him except that which has its source in his own freedom; and, consequently, everything is denied him except the freedom to make history by making himself.

To these criticisms raised by modern man, the man of the traditional civilizations could reply by a countercriticism that would at the same time be a defense of the type of archaic existence. It is becoming more and more doubtful, he might say, if modern man can make history. On the contrary, the more modern [12] he becomes—that is, without defenses against the terror of history—the less chance he has of himself making history. For history either makes itself (as the result of the seed sown by acts that occurred in the past, several centuries or even several millennia ago; we will cite the consequences of the discovery of agriculture or metallurgy, of the Industrial Revolution in the eighteenth century, and so on) or it tends to be made by an increasingly smaller number of men who not only prohibit the mass of their contemporaries from directly or indirectly intervening in the history they are making (or which the small group is making), but in addition have at their disposal means sufficient to force each individual to endure, for his own part, the consequences of this history, that is, to live immediately and continuously in dread of history. Modern man's boasted freedom to make history is illusory for nearly the whole of the human race. At most,

[12] It is well to make clear that, in this context, "modern man" is such in his insistence upon being exclusively historical; i.e., that he is, above all, the "man" of historicism, of Marxism, and of existentialism. It is superfluous to add that not all of our contemporaries recognize themselves in such a man.





man is left free to choose between two positions: (1) to oppose the history that is being made by the very small minority (and, in this case, he is free to choose between suicide and deportation); (2) to take refuge in a subhuman existence or in flight. The "freedom" that historical existence implies was possible—and even then within certain limits—at the beginning of the modern period, but it tends to become inaccessible as the period becomes more historical, by which we mean more alien from any transhistorical model. It is perfectly natural, for example, that Marxism and Fascism must lead to the establishment of two types of historical existence: that of the leader (the only really "free" man) and that of the followers, who find, in the historical existence of the leader, not an archetype of their own existence but the lawgiver of the gestures that are provisionally permitted them.

Thus, for traditional man, modern man affords the type neither of a free being nor of a creator of history. On the contrary, the man of the archaic civilizations can be proud of his mode of existence, which allows him to be free and to create. He is free to be no longer what he was, free to annul his own history through periodic abolition of time and collective regeneration. This freedom in respect to his own history—which, for the modern, is not only irreversible but constitutes human existence—cannot be claimed by the man who wills to be historical. We know that the archaic and traditional societies granted freedom each year to begin a new, a "pure" existence, with virgin possibilities. And there is no question of seeing in this an imitation of nature, which also undergoes periodic regeneration, "beginning anew" each spring, with each spring recovering all its powers intact. Indeed, whereas nature repeats itself, each new spring being the same eternal spring (that is, the repetition of the Creation), archaic

man's "purity" after the periodic abolition of time and the recovery of his virtualities intact allows him, on the threshold of each "new life," a continued existence in eternity and hence the definitive abolition, *hic et nunc*, of profane time. The intact "possibilities" of nature each spring and archaic man's possibilities on the threshold of each year are, then, not homologous. Nature recovers only itself, whereas archaic man recovers the possibility of definitively transcending time and living in eternity. Insofar as he fails to do so, insofar as he "sins," that is, falls into historical existence, into time, he each year thwarts the possibility. At least he retains the freedom to annul his faults, to wipe out the memory of his "fall into history," and to make another attempt to escape definitively from time.[13]

Furthermore, archaic man certainly has the right to consider himself more creative than modern man, who sees himself as creative only in respect to history. Every year, that is, archaic man takes part in the repetition of the cosmogony, the creative act *par excellence*. We may even add that, for a certain time, man was creative on the cosmic plane, imitating this periodic cosmogony (which he also repeated on all the other planes of life, cf. pp. 80 ff.) and participating in it.[14] We should also bear in mind the "creationistic" implications of the Oriental philosophies and techniques (especially the Indian), which thus find a place in the same traditional horizon. The East unanimously rejects the idea of the ontological irreducibility of the existent, even though it too sets out from a sort of "existentialism" (i.e., from acknowledging suffering as the situation of any possible cosmic condition). Only, the East does not accept the destiny of the human being as final and irreducible. Oriental techniques attempt above all to

[13] On this, see our *Patterns in Comparative Religion* (English trans., London and New York, 1958), pp. 398 ff.

[14] Not to mention the possibilities of "magical creation," which exist in traditional societies, and which are real.





annul or transcend the human condition. In this respect, it is justifiable to speak not only of freedom (in the positive sense) or deliverance (in the negative sense) but actually of creation; for what is involved is creating a new man and creating him on a suprahuman plane, a man-god, such as the imagination of historical man has never dreamed it possible to create.

## Despair or Faith

However this may be, our dialogue between archaic man and modern man does not affect our problem. Whatever be the truth in respect to the freedom and the creative virtualities of historical man, it is certain that none of the historicistic philosophies is able to defend him from the terror of history. We could even imagine a final attempt: to save history and establish an ontology of history, events would be regarded as a series of "situations" by virtue of which the human spirit should attain knowledge of levels of reality otherwise inaccessible to it. This attempt to justify history is not without interest,[15] and we anticipate returning to the subject elsewhere. But we are able to observe here and now that such a position affords a shelter from the terror of history only insofar as it postulates the existence at least of the Universal Spirit. What consolation

[15] It is only through some such reasoning that it would be possible to found a sociology of knowledge that should not lead to relativism and skepticism. The "influences"—economic, social, national, cultural—that affect "ideologies" (in the sense which Karl Mannheim gave the term) would not annul their objective value any more than the fever or the intoxication that reveals to a poet a new poetic creation impairs the value of the latter. All these social, economic, and other influences would, on the contrary, be occasions for envisaging a spiritual universe from new angles. But it goes without saying that a sociology of knowledge, that is, the study of the social conditioning of ideologies, could avoid relativism only by affirming the autonomy of the spirit—which, if we understand him aright, Karl Mannheim did not dare to affirm.

should we find in knowing that the sufferings of millions of men have made possible the revelation of a limitary situation of the human condition if, beyond that limitary situation, there should be only nothingness? Again, there is no question here of judging the validity of a historicistic philosophy, but only of establishing to what extent such a philosophy can exorcise the terror of history. If, for historical tragedies to be excused, it suffices that they should be regarded as the means by which man has been enabled to know the limit of human resistance, such an excuse can in no way make man less haunted by the terror of history.

Basically, the horizon of archetypes and repetition cannot be transcended with impunity unless we accept a philosophy of freedom that does not exclude God. And indeed this proved to be true when the horizon of archetypes and repetition was transcended, for the first time, by Judaeo-Christianism, which introduced a new category into religious experience: the category of *faith*. It must not be forgotten that, if Abraham's faith can be defined as "for God everything is possible," the faith of Christianity implies that everything is also possible for man. ". . . Have faith in God. For verily I say unto you, That whosoever shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; and shall not doubt in his heart, but shall believe that those things which he saith shall come to pass; he shall have whatsoever he saith. Therefore I say unto you, What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them" (Mark 11 : 22–24).[16] Faith, in this context, as in many others, means absolute emancipation from any kind of natural "law" and hence the highest freedom that man can imagine: freedom to intervene even in the ontological constitution of the universe. It is, consequently, a pre-eminently creative freedom. In other words, it constitutes a new formula for man's collaboration with the creation—the first, but also the only such formula accorded to him since the traditional horizon of archetypes and repetition was transcended. Only such a freedom (aside from its soteriological, hence, in the strict sense, its religious value) is able to defend modern man from the terror of history—a freedom, that is, which has its source and finds its guaranty and support in God. Every other modern freedom, whatever satisfactions it may procure to him who possesses it, is powerless to justify history; and this, for every man who is sincere with himself, is equivalent to the terror of history.

[16] Such affirmations must not be complacently dismissed merely because they imply the possibility of miracle. If miracles have been so rare since the appearance of Christianity, the blame rests not on Christianity but on Christians.





We may say, furthermore, that Christianity is the "religion" of modern man and historical man, of the man who simultaneously discovered personal freedom and continuous time (in place of cyclical time). It is even interesting to note that the existence of God forced itself far more urgently upon modern man, for whom history exists as such, as history and not as repetition, than upon the man of the archaic and traditional cultures, who, to defend himself from the terror of history, had at his disposition all the myths, rites, and customs mentioned in the course of this book. Moreover, although the idea of God and the religious experiences that it implies existed from the most distant ages, they could be, and were, replaced at times by other religious "forms" (totemism, cult of ancestors, Great Goddesses of fecundity, and so on) that more promptly answered the religious needs of primitive humanity. In the horizon of archetypes and repetition, the terror of history, when it appeared, could be supported. Since the "invention" of faith, in the Judaeo-Christian sense of the word (= for God all is possible), the man who has left the

horizon of archetypes and repetition can no longer defend himself against that terror except through the idea of God. In fact, it is only by presupposing the existence of God that he conquers, on the one hand, freedom (which grants him autonomy in a universe governed by laws or, in other words, the "inauguration" of a mode of being that is new and unique in the universe) and, on the other hand, the certainty that historical tragedies have a transhistorical meaning, even if that meaning is not always visible for humanity in its present condition. Any other situation of modern man leads, in the end, to despair. It is a despair provoked not by his own human existentiality, but by his presence in a historical universe in which almost the whole of mankind lives prey to a continual terror (even if not always conscious of it).

In this respect, Christianity incontestibly proves to be the religion of "fallen man": and this to the extent to which modern man is irremediably identified with history and progress, and to which history and progress are a fall, both implying the final abandonment of the paradise of archetypes and repetition.